

City of Kalamazoo
PLANNING COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes
April 9, 2025
FINAL

Members Present: Ian Smith; Christine Dascenzo; Michelle Audette-Bauman; Jennifer Swan; Mitchell Curtiss; Wendell Tolber; Brian Pittelko; Thomas Kostrzewa; Zack Wilson

Members Excused:

City Staff: Bobby Durkee, Assistant City Planner; Beth Cheeseman, Executive Administrative Assistant; Charlie Bear, Assistant City Attorney

A. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Commissioner Pittelko called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Planner Durkee proceeded with roll call and determined there was a quorum.

B. ADOPTION OF FORMAL AGENDA

Commissioner Swan, seconded by Commissioner Kostrzewa, moved approval of the April 9, 2025 Planning Commission agenda as presented. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Swan, seconded by Commissioner Dascenzo, moved approval of the March 6, 2025 minutes as presented. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

D. COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Planner Durkee announced there was an application for the May meeting.

E. PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. P.C. #2025.01 A request from the Department of Community Planning & Economic Development to change the zoning of all the properties on Roskam Ct., Millard Ct. & 736 E Crosstown Pkwy from Manufacturing, Limited (M-1) to Live-Work 1 (LW-1) & Manufacturing, General (M-2)

Planner Durkee explained that the proposal to rezone the properties from M-1 to LW-1 and M-2 was initiated by residents who live on Roskam and want to build an adult foster care residence. He said the properties were likely missed in previous rezonings because it wasn't classified commercial or residential but was manufacturing. Because this should have been caught, it became a City-driven request. Planner Durkee showed pictures and maps of the area. He spoke about the heavier manufacturing district nearby and the LW1 area to the south. Staff decided it was appropriate to bring LW1 further north because it

matched the residential character of the area and is a less intensive use. Planner Durkee said no concerns were brought forward by the residents. Changing the zoning allows some flexibility for homeowners if they want something beyond a single family home. Planner Durkee reviewed the current and future land use maps. He shared that a rezoning is subject to the Public Participation Plan. Because of work schedules, it was decided to send a postcard to the residents of the area. Planner Durkee said he received one response from the postcard and three postcards came back in return mail. Regular notices were sent as well. He showed pictures of the properties/streets.

Planner Durkee reviewed the criteria for a rezoning. He felt the rezoning met the criteria - bringing the zoning in compliance with existing and proposed land uses and removing barriers to development. Planner Durkee stated that staff are supportive of the rezoning request.

Commissioner Dascenzo asked for the proposed zoning map to be displayed again. Planner Durkee complied.

Commissioner Pittelko explained how people can give comment on the rezoning.

Call in comment

Mr. Richard Stewart expressed concerns that City staff have used zoning as a weapon against existing property owners. He said he wanted to make sure existing property owners were given the opportunity to say yes or no to this rezoning proposal. Mr. Stewart thought they were using zoning to end the diverse characteristics of the neighborhood. He believed the neighborhood's success has been tied to its diversity. Mr. Stewart also asked them to prioritize remote participation for those who cannot attend the Planning Commission in person. They should not hold a public meeting if the technology is not working.

Commissioner Dascenzo asked Planner Durkee to talk about the proposed zoning and all of the uses allowed. Planner Durkee said the proposed zoning permits residential uses from 1, duplex, 3+ and 5+. It also permits a maker space (retail space with small scale manufacturing), adult and child foster care. He thought some light commercial uses were permitted, but he didn't have that information in front of him.

Commissioner Curtiss mentioned that one parcel was proposed to be rezoned M-2. He wondered if there were significant changes to uses or allowable uses under the new code in zoning. Planner Durkee explained that the parcel is one of three or four parcels that have not been combined. That parcel is being used for a stormwater pond. In theory, the facility next door could expand, but the entire site would have to be redeveloped. It was thought best to keep the zoning consistent with the other parcels owned by the facility. There is no access to the property from Roskam Court – technically there is no street frontage. The owner has access to the site from the east.

Commissioner Pittelko asked what public feedback was from the postcard. Planner Durkee said the person who responded was in favor of the rezoning. He said when he was out taking photos, a man talked with him, referenced that he saw the card, and that the rezoning made a lot of sense. The residents who initiated the rezoning live in two houses on the street and were supportive. Planner Durkee said they only received supportive comments.

Commissioner Pittelko said that he understood the caller's concern, but that when they are moving from a nonconforming to conforming use, that reflects what the people want.

Commissioner Curtiss, seconded by Commissioner Audette Bauman, moved to approve the rezoning request from the Department of Community Planning & Economic Development to change the zoning of all the properties on Roskam Ct., Millard Ct. & 736 E Crosstown Pkwy from Manufacturing, Limited (M-1) to Live-Work 1 (LW-1) & Manufacturing, General (M-2)

A roll call vote was taken and the motion passed unanimously.

Planner Durkee noted this will move forward to City Commission.

F. DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

Planner Durkee explained possible processes for the elections.

1. Elect Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary Officers
 - Commissioner Pittelko volunteered to be Chair, but cautioned he only has a year left on his term to serve.
 - Commissioner Curtiss said he would be willing to serve as Chair, Vice Chair, or Secretary.
 - Commissioner Swan said she would be willing to serve as Secretary or Vice Chair.
 - Commissioner Swan verified that she would volunteer as Vice Chair, and Commissioner Curtiss verified that he would volunteer as Secretary.

Attorney Bear confirmed that the vote could be done as a slate.

Commissioner Kostrzewa, seconded by Commissioner Dascenzo, made a motion to nominate Commissioner Pittelko as Chair, Commissioner Swan as Vice Chair, and Commissioner Curtiss as Secretary.

A voice vote was taken and the motion passed unanimously.

2. Delegate Site Plan Review to the Site Plan Review Committee

Planner Durkee explained that one of the key roles of the Planning Commission in Michigan is the authority to review and approve site plans. The City zoning ordinance allows the Planning Commission to delegate that authority to the Site Plan Review Committee.

Commissioner Swan, seconded by Commissioner Curtiss, moved to delegate site plan review to the Site Plan Review Committee.

A voice vote was taken and passed unanimously.

3. Annual Retreat & Training - Development Process & Site Plan Policy Update

Planner Durkee reported that the Planning Department started looking at the development process - what was working and what was not working. The development process was broken into three lanes: Pre-Development, Site plan review, and Permitting & Inspections. Planner Durkee explained that the process encompasses an idea all the way to occupancy.

Planner Durkee explained that the Site Plan Review Process is outlined in the zoning enabling act and zoning ordinance which gives the Planning Commission the authority to approve or disapprove a site plan. Annually the Planning Commission takes responsibility for the process or delegates it.

Planner Durkee cited development challenges of inefficient channels, timelines, delays, and varying project needs that can make projects complicated for developers. In January 2025, they started implementing improvements in the process. So far, there have been mostly positive reviews of the new process. The City Commission authorized a Civil Engineer position directly related to site plan review. Planner Durkee shared that they held a series of engagement meetings with the community and developers to inform and get feedback on the process. A virtual presentation is available on the City's webpage. He said they will continue dialogue to see what is working.

Planner Durkee outlined the process steps and lead staff.

Pre-Development Phase – Step 1

Pre-development offers a single point of contact, an application form, and tracking method for every inquiry. Response time is 48 hours from when a form is submitted.

Site Plan Review – Step 2

The Site Plan Review Policy was updated. In the new format, they implemented a Checklist meeting. Developers walk with reviewers step by step on the checklist. They receive a copy of the checklist showing what information is missing and what needs to be added to the site plan. The Checklist references the code, meaning that everyone is using same language and format.

Once a project is scheduled for a full site plan review, it is posted online. The project will stay online until the site plan is approved.

Permits & Occupancy – Step 3

Planner Durkee shared that this step includes inspections of different aspects of the development. They now offer a pre-construction meeting - largely contained within the Building Department.

Planner Durkee said they are trying to communicate more with City Administration, the media, and continue to host 1:1 meetings with the development community. He shared that they have started to modify their website to match this three step development process.

Commissioner Wilson asked if there was an estimate of how much time these improvements will cut out of the existing process. Planner Durkee said they do track the process and anticipate having more information about that in a year.

Planner Durkee gave a more in-depth review of the Site Plan Review Process. He shared that there are 28 standards of approval in the zoning ordinance. Planner Durkee listed the reviewers and their disciplines. He explained the types of things each reviewer looks for and the communication needed between committee members. He mentioned Natural Features Protection and historic reviews. Planner Durkee showed an example of the new Checklist and pointed out where they add the specific code reference. He showed the website address for site plan review and talked about the online site plan review resources.

G. REPORTS:

1. City Planner's Report

Planner Durkee shared that there would be a meeting in May for a rezoning application. He indicated there would be an upcoming cell antennae replacement that would come before them. Commissioner Pittelko anticipated seeing Master Plan updates soon as well.

2. Site Plan List

Planner Durkee mentioned that site plans under review from 2024 are shown on the website. He has only included 2025 projects on their current site plan list.

H. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Commissioner Pittelko shared how people could call in to comment.

Call in comment

Mr. Richard Stewart spoke about his history of repurposing commercial buildings. He felt the current state of the site plan process prohibits small business owners from repurposing existing properties. Mr. Stewart believes it is unmanageable for small businesses to reuse existing empty stock. He said he had no obstacles until about 10 years ago. Mr. Stewart indicated that the site plan process and City staff have scared away at least three purchasers of his property. He stated that he has been a victim of the new procedure.

I. CITY COMMISSION LIAISON COMMENTS

Commissioner Praedel thanked the newly elected Planning Commission officers for volunteering. He also congratulated the two new Planning Commissioners who were confirmed to the board.

Commissioner Praedel said he takes his liaison responsibility seriously. He feels it is valuable to hear the Planning Commissioners perspectives and share that at the City Commission meetings. Commissioner

Praedel spoke about the Respecting Differences on Neurodiversity event. He encouraged them to attend in the future. Commissioner Praedel spoke positively about the 2025 Master Plan and the progress made on goals. He encouraged feedback for the IK2035 Plan It phase, saying that involvement matters. Commissioner Praedel shared there was one more public IK2035 event on April 29 at the Crawlspace Theatre. There were also two beautification events coming up. They could find out more about these events on the Kalamazoo City website.

J. MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS BY PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Pittelko welcomed the new members and thanked them for their willingness to serve.

K. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Pittelko adjourned the meeting at 8:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Anderson".

Christina Anderson,
City Planner
Community Planning & Economic Development